

FOREWORD



Today's globalised realities make, on the one hand, a c q u a i n t - i n g oneself with foreign climes and on the other, shaping one's own image abroad, indispensable activities. These days, distant

regions of the earth are now perceived to be closer and people located in far away locations are becoming interested in Hungary and its inhabitants. In the parallel national journeys of self-awareness and self-promotion, geography has played a key role since ancient times. Consequently, Hungarian geography and cartography have always played an eminent part not only in the development of knowledge of the country and its nation but – through publications in foreign languages – in shaping the image of Hungary abroad.

The time is now upon us to offer an up-to-date, digestible, English language summary of the country's politics, its society and economy, twenty years after the change in political system. A series of regional atlases launched on the initiative of the Presidency of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS) – until now represented by the publications *South Eastern Europe in Maps* (2005, 2007) and *Ukraine in Maps* (2008) – provide an appropriate framework for "*Hungary in Maps*" which is conceived as a precursor to the new edition of the National Atlas of Hungary, to be produced under the coordination of the Geographical Research Institute HAS.

This publication seeks to inform and educate about Hungary – a state with over 1100 years of history; a comparatively small country with a population of ten million and a moderate supply of raw materials, located in the south-eastern corner of Central Europe, and more precisely in the Carpathian Basin – with the help of more than 220 maps and tables. This is the land where air flows arriving from the East European

Plain, Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea converge but is has also served as an arena for the mixing of various people and cultural influences during times of peace, and borne witness to their bitter clashes during wars. 90% of the 13 to 14 million Hungarians found across the globe are citizens of only eight countries sharing the territory of the Carpathian Basin. Even though out of any one hundred Europeans only two are Hungarian, the historical and cultural significance of this nation at the centre of Europe has always exceeded its size. Even during the socialist era, the country appeared on the European radar, never more so than at the time of the revolution in October 1956, and later in 1989 when Hungary, playing an important role in lifting the Iron Curtain, greatly contributed to the dismantling of the Berlin wall, German unification and the collapse of the Eastern Bloc. Logically enough it was among the first of the post-communist countries to join NATO and the EU. Hungary is deserved of close attention not only in the field of politics, but also that of culture and learning. Franz Liszt, Ernő Dohnányi, Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály can take their rightful place amongst the musical greats of the world. Of the Nobel Prize laureates (e.g., Albert Szent-Györgyi, György Békésy, Eugene Wigner, Dennis Gábor, George Andrew Oláh and Imre Kertész) 13 were born in Hungary, and 8 of them born to Hungarian parents. Thanks to its international reputation, cultural heritage and nature, the country has become one of the popular destinations for international tourism over the past two decades.

On the 20th anniversary of regime change, 10th anniversary of acquiring NATO membership and the 5th of our EU accession, the culmination of diverse foreign interest in the country has precipitated the publication of this richly illustrated atlas. Benefiting from explanatory text, it seeks to introduce the reader to Hungary's natural environment, society and economy, and the changes therein that have taken place over the past two decades.

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